

Eugene Nida's "Functional Equivalence" and Harmonious Space of Eco-translation: Differences and Similarities

Qinqin Wu^{1,*}, Mingze Su²

¹Capital Normal University, Beijing, China, 100048.

²M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia, 119991.

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Corresponding author: Qinqin Wu, Capital Normal University, Beijing, China, 100048.

Abstract

The core idea of "functional equivalence" in translation was developed by Eugene Nida and as a representative figure of western communication theory school, his thoughts have had a profound influence on the process of world translatology. Language is an ecosystem, and translation is at least a process of interaction between the two ecosystems of source language and target language. Kushnina constructs a harmonious translation model from the perspective of language ecology, and regards translation as having different explicit and implicit language or speech transformations in the form of a collaborative system. Comparing and analyzing the differences and common directions of the two theories, this paper analyzes whether the latter can fill the limitations of the former in terms of functional equivalence, and presents a harmonious trend of translation effects. Ecological interpretation of classical translation theories can help to narrow the theoretical defects and broaden the scope of translation theory research.

Keywords

Functional Equivalence, Harmonious Translation, Translation Theory

Eugene Nida was involved in the early translation of the *Bible* and proposed a series of classical translation theories based on his understanding of morphology and syntax, (Jin, 1998) which had an extensive and far-reaching influence on translation efforts throughout the world. During his early career, Nida advocated linguistic structuralism. He introduced the concept of "formal equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence" for the first time in *Toward a science of translating*, replacing "dynamic" with "function" (Jin, 1998), which established him as one of the leading figures in western translation theory.

Equivalence is an idealized state of the translation. Translation efforts result in the target language and the source language being positioned on both sides of the equal sign, and equality holds. Because of factors such as language form, cultural level, social background, and many others, the ideal state cannot be achieved. For many years, scholars have been devoted to the pursuit of the infinite convergence of translation effect to the ideal state. Nowadays, a number of disciplines are emphasizing ecology, and the ecology of translation is frequently discussed, and the related theoretical system is becoming increasingly elaborate.

1. Eugene Nida and Functional Equivalence Theory

In Western translation theory, functional equivalence theory is one of the branches of communicative theory. The development of this theory can be divided into three stages: descriptive linguistic theory of translation, communicative theory of translation, and sociosemiotic approach of translation.

Nida's translation studies begin with descriptive linguistics. Research at this stage is primarily focused on syntax, lexical analysis, and semantic communication methods and principles. From the standpoint of syntax and morphology, Nida explains the internal relationship between language and translation based on a large number of observations made about words and sentences. In the first place, Nida abandons the traditional concept of a part of speech. Words, such as verbs, nouns, and adverbs, show the syntactic relationship between them in sentences, according to him. Nida discovered that even though the parts of speech and syntax may differ, the deep meaning of semantics may remain the same. Due to this feature, it is practical and effective to get rid of the limitations of parts of speech and to change parts of speech as needed for translation. Second, Nida discovered the importance of core sentences in a language system. A variety of languages embody a variety of cultures, and different cultures also create a range of languages with varying structures. In terms of syntactic structure, English and Russian are highly formal and logical languages, having strict syntactic structures and distinct levels; Conversely, Chinese emphasizes parataxis at the expense of form, resulting in a relatively incomplete syntactic structure. In this case, it is particularly important to transfer the syntactic structure during translation. In Nida's view, there is one "sentence pattern that is basically acceptable to all human languages", which is the "kernel sentence" (Cao, 2013).

The more kernel sentences there are, the less likely the recipients of any language system in the world will misunderstand basic semantics. The purpose of using kernel sentences is to remove the constraints imposed by syntax on translators. Using Nida's concept of sentence pattern conversion and kernel sentence, translators have more room for experimentation and the translated text will be more fluent and natural.

Communicative theory is the development period of Nida's translation studies and the formation period of classical theory. As a result of the level of science and technology at that time, communicative thought developed in translation theory, and he translated the term "communication" from modern communication theory into his own translation study (Nida, 2004).

According to Nida, communication is the essence and ultimate purpose of translation. To accomplish this objective, the translator must even adjust the translation in time so that the receiver will be able to understand it. (Nida, 2004). Besides the factors from the source language, such as the author, the text and the background, the translator should also take into account a variety of factors in the entire translation process, including the language structure of the target language, the level of culture of the target readers, and the historical background of the time. Nida opposes the translation model that directly transforms the surface structure of the source language into the surface structure of the target language. Translators must adopt a tortuous path when analyzing, transforming, reorganizing and testing a text in accordance with the idea that the ultimate direction of translation is communication. The theory of reverse conversion was developed based on these four processes (Nida, 2004). Nida emphasizes the reading effect of the source language receiver at the same time by comparing and analyzing the relationship between the source language receiver and the original text as well as the relationship between the target language receiver and the target text, formally establishing the theory of "dynamic equivalence." During this stage, Nida established himself as a representative of western translation theory.

Sociosemiotics represents Nida's supplementary translation studies and his theoretical system's adjustment period. From the study period, it is evident that semantic communication is the core issue of translation, and Nida introduced the concept of language form during the stage of social semiotics. As Nida pointed out in his book *From One Language to Another*, everything related to translation has its meaning, including the form of the language (Waard & Nida, 1986). In other words, form carries meaning and expresses meaning, and changing its form will change its meaning. In the original text, verbs are used for the same semantic meaning, but in the target text, nouns are used. When reading the target text, the target text readers will naturally experience a static reading experience for the semantic expression, whereas the original text readers will experience a dynamic reading experience. Therefore, the translator must compare and adjust the lexical meanings, rhetorical devices, and grammatical categories of the original text and the target text, observe the readers of the original text, and adjust the forms so that the readers are properly able to understand and appreciate the target text. "Functional equivalence" requires both content and form. Meanwhile, the theory emphasizes that when there is an irreconcilable contradiction between content and form, content should take precedence. 'Functional equivalence' strengthens the concept that translation is primarily concerned with communication, and enhances the status of target readers to an unprecedented level.

2. Kushnina and the Theory of Spatial Harmony in Translation

Russian linguistics has vigorously developed the branch disciplines of ecological linguistics, and translation ecology (эколингвистика) is one of them, based on the research achievements of other countries and the solid foundation of language philosophy in Russia. As one of the pioneers of this field, Kushnina has developed a complete theoretical sys-

tem of harmonious translation space, a translation space structure, and a translation hierarchy model. The translation process is defined by Kushnina as a process of transplantation from one language to another and from one ecosystem to another based on eco-translation ecology (Kushnina, 2014). Research in this discipline is focused on "the role of the original text and the target text in their natural, cultural, and social environments, and the methods and means of preservation in translation." Among the current research hotspots are analyzing the relationship between source and target ecosystems, measuring the positive, negative, and neutral vectors of target ecosystems, and applying this theory to time.

2.1 The spatial structure of translation

In translation, meaning and culture transform from one language to another through the interaction of at least two ecosystems of the source language and the target language. According to the theory of spatial harmony in translation, the original text and the target text should be harmonious in their expression. According to Kushnina, a special ecological space exists within the translator's consciousness that ensures and maintains the transition from the source language to the target language (Kushnina, 2008). This ecological space is the first place where the original text can be found. The space is divided into six fields: the author field, the translator field, the audience field, the content field, the energy field, and the communication field. At the same time, each field has its own independent meaning, while collaborating with the others to form the overall meaning of the text. In comparison with other fields, the content field occupies a prominent position, as it is located within the center of ecological space.

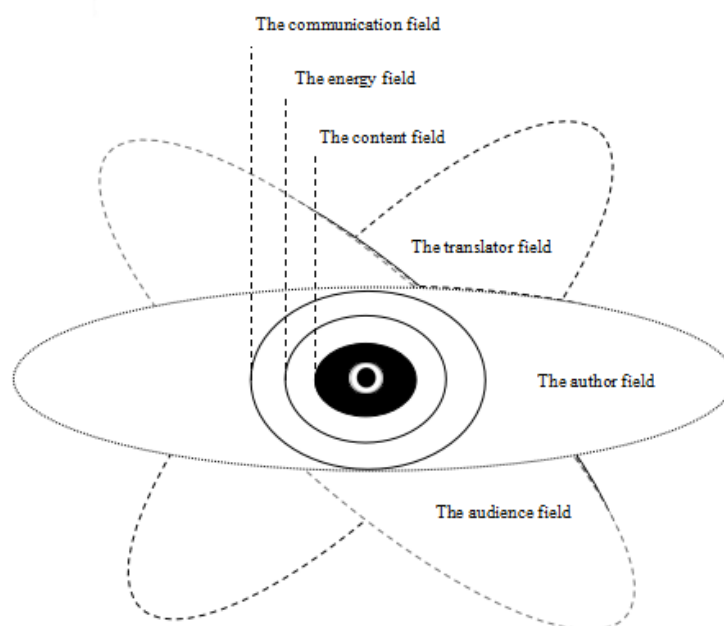


Figure 1. The spatial structure of translation (Liu & Pan, 2020).

First of all, the content field differs significantly from other fields. In the center of the translation space, the content field represents the explicit meaning of the text. In terms of semantic expression, the center of the field is the most direct and obvious. Central readers of the field can read the most explicit language expression because the translator uses the so-called "translation strategy" of the original text the least, and source and target readers have the least "misunderstanding" of text information processing. In terms of content and form, the center language, source language, and target language of the field can achieve the highest degree of two-way equivalence.

There are five peripheral components of translation space: the author field, the translator field, the audience field, the energy field, and the communication field. Each of these components expresses implicit meanings. The author field is composed of all the presuppositions and intentions of the author and is associated with the pre discourse. This field is made up of the deep meaning of the discourse in a translator's consciousness, which is related to their internal discourse. Translators decode the translated text's internal text in order to reconstruct the text image of the translated text. This is the precondition for a deep-meaning association. The audience field is composed of background knowledge outside of

language and is related to context. Post-discourse generates the energy field. Intertextuality generates the communication field. Through reading the translated text, readers interpret the translated text using surface language symbols and all relevant text information symbols in memory in order to achieve hypertext communication.

Every field cooperates with the others, and each field plays a role in creating a harmonious target language ecology, which is characterized by correct grammar, standard language, fluent syntax and semantics, and a harmonious and stable relationship between the languages.

2.2 Translation hierarchy model

From the perspective of harmony, Kushnina divides translation quality into four levels (Kushnina, 2008).

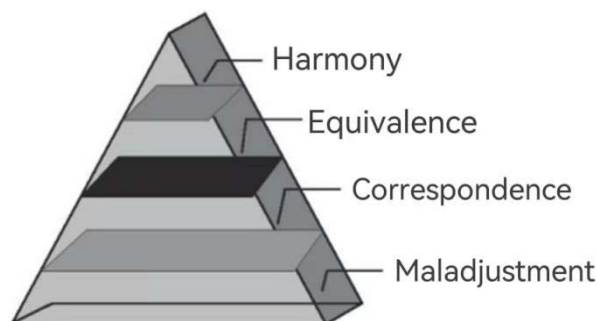


Figure 2. Translation hierarchy model (Liu & Pan, 2020).

1) The fourth level, is maladjustment. It manifests in several ways, including translation errors, translations that do not correspond with the original text in sentences and texts, rough translations, word-for-word translations, and random translations. 2) The third level, is correspondence. The translator locates the corresponding words, successfully converts the original content into the target text, and the target text conveys communicative meaning to the reader. However, the translation and the original text are not able to achieve a smooth and natural correspondence of meaning due to the poor control ability of the language surface structure. 3) The second level, is equivalence. As a concrete manifestation, the translator utilizes precise translation strategies and effective translation methods to accomplish a variety of interlingual transitions in all fields except the communication field (see Figure 1). 4) The first level, is harmony. By the time the translator has completed the cultural transformation, the reader has completed intertextuality, overcame the inevitable differences that result from the intersection of cultures, and comprehended the cultural meaning of the translated text, thus constituting the highest level of translation. From low to high, with distinct levels and strict grades, the above represents the four steps of translation. A translation is a process that proceeds from maladjustment to correspondence to equivalence to harmony, in accordance with Kushnina's theory. An intermediate stage leading to harmonious translation is correspondence and equivalence.

3. Similarities and Differences

A comparison of Eugene Nida's "functional equivalence" translation theory with Kushnina's harmonious translation space theory reveals a high degree of consistency between them, and the common direction is greater than the difference between them. This explanation can be summarized as follows:

3.1 Similarities

3.1.1 Content and form

The development of Nida's theoretical system requires that content optimization and all other translation elements, including form, yield to content, no matter in the descriptive linguistic stage, which embodies part-of-speech transformation, or in the dynamic equivalence and functional equivalence phases (Nida, 2004). While the form itself conveys meaning, translators should choose to ensure the accurate transmission of content rather than controlling both contents and meaning simultaneously. Kushnina's translation spatial structure (see Figure 1) is characterized by a central content field and a relationship between meaning and the inner text, context, post-text, intertextual and intertextual contexts,

which correspond to the author field, translator field, audience field, and energy field respectively. An explicit and implicit relationship exists between the content field and other fields, which is manifested as opposition and unity between the center and the edge. Their theoretical systems value content over form, which is not only at the core of their respective theories, but also a common direction.

3.1.2 Minimum semantics

At the early stages of his research, Nida discovered that kernel sentences are the most effective means of conveying meaning and content. Morphology and syntax of core sentences are also relatively simple. During the translation process, translators frequently use core sentences while placing other semantics in the clauses of core sentences or the aggregation of kernel sentences in texts. Based on observations, this method can convey the original content, meaning, thought, culture, and other factors more accurately and accurately, and the target readers will be more fluent in understanding it. Among the fields in translation space, Kushnina considers the content field to be an explicit expression, while the remainder are implicit expressions. According to Kushnina, the semantic expression found in the center of the content field is the most direct, and readers of different languages are able to understand the same meaning. For the most important texts within the content area, translators do not require complicated translation strategies and methods. Compared to Nida and Kushnina's work, we can see that both researchers found the simplest way to express content in a language system, where each factor has a high transmission efficiency and minimal "error" during the process of converting the source language into the target language.

3.1.3 Translator and deep semantics

Nida presented the reverse transformation theory in the stage of communication theory, which divides translators' translation behavior into four stages, namely analysis, transformation, and reorganization, and tests the first three steps based on the reactions of readers (Nida, 2004). According to this theory, translation is not merely a transformation of the surface structure of a source and target language but is an embodiment of its content and meaning through the text. Based on Kushnina's theory, translators are intertwined with inner texts, and they behave in translation so that they can comprehend the deeper meanings beneath the surface structure of the text. In reverse transformation theory, the translator actually transforms the source text image into the target text image, which is very similar to the concept of decoding and reorganizing. In Nida's classical translation theory system or Kushnina's harmonious translation space theory system, the interaction between the translator and deep semantics plays an important role in determining the quality of translation.

3.2 Differences

3.2.1 Final inspection

According to Nida's theoretical system, the test standard for measuring "functional equivalence" is the reader's reaction, which takes into account the reader's cultural background, the era of origin, education level, as well as other factors. The concept of culture was classified by Nida in 1945 after he clarified the relationship between language and culture. His theory was that culture could be classified into the ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture, and when dealing with translation problems, translators should take into account the correspondence between the original text and the target text in the various cultural classifications (Nida, 1945). In Kushnina's view, the outermost part of the translation space occupied by the communication field can be directly replaced by the cultural field in concept, (Liu & Pan, 2020) composed of hypertext information, including surface language symbols for translation and all pertinent text information symbols stored in memory, in place of the communication field. The extent to which readers' thoughts, cultural level, and even personality are included in the definition of "culture" depends on how different theorists define and interpret it. Kushnina directly equates culture with communication from a macro perspective, whereas Eugene Nida viewed culture as an important reference point to realize "functional equivalence". The above illustrates that the two theories use different tests for determining whether translation can accomplish its communicative purpose.

3.2.2 Audience

In the case of translation, the audience is the reader, and the audience's reaction determines whether it is possible to achieve "functional equivalence". The audience and its related factors are included in Nida's theoretical system of observation. According to Kushnina, audiences are divided into independent fields based on context. Context can be divided into two types: internal and external. By dividing the relationship between audience and internal and external context independently, Kushnina demonstrates that under the theory of harmonious translation space, audience field and communication field are not inclusive, but separate. From the above, it is apparent that Eugene brought it into the scope

of communication while Kushnina chose to focus on its connection with context.

4. Research on complementarity

4.1 The pre-judgment of the author

In the translation process, it is often impossible for the translator to predict the author's intention, as in diachronic literary text translations. As part of her research, Kushnina examines in detail the relationship between the author and the translator, as well as the important factors related to them - pre-discourse and intra-discourse. In the author's consciousness, all the thoughts, presuppositions, and ideas of the author from the author field, which is ultimately manifested as the original text and become the translator's first existence. In addition, it extends to translators' behavior, including author fields, translator fields, and content fields, all of which are interconnected and form a special translation ecological space. One of the prerequisites for ensuring the harmony of translation is a cooperation between the author field and the translator field in space. Based on Eugene Nida's theoretical system, the focus is on the response of the source and target readers, and whether they tend to respond equally depends in large part on the accuracy of the translator's prediction of the author. In Kushnina's theory, the author's pre-judgment is related to whether the translator understands the deep semantics of the text. In translation practice, the translator should interact with the author field to facilitate the movement of the translator field, the convergence of the source language author and translator, and the interpretation process in real-time.

4.2 Harmony and equivalence

According to Kushnina's translation hierarchy model, correspondence and equivalence are important intermediate stages in the translation process. Eugene Nida's theoretical system of functional equivalence is universal and ideal for translation. The processes of reading and comprehension are extremely complex, and source and target readers have different social backgrounds, personal preferences, and purposes. In practice, equivalence can only be observed as a state that is infinitely approaching. Is this to imply that translation is always incomplete? "Equivalence" is not equal, so it is worthwhile to discuss whether the concept of harmony has any meaning.

5. Conclusion

The principles of ecology emphasize integrity and synergy, as well as the dependence of individuals on the whole and their interaction with one another. Any change in an individual in an ecosystem will result in the linkage of multiple individuals. It can be seen from a comparison of Eugene Nida's "functional equivalence" translation theory and Kushnina's ecological translation harmonious space theory that there are similarities and differences, as well as complementary theoretical significance. As stated in the eco-translation space theory, the concept of harmony, the last step in translation, compensates for the logical defect that translation cannot be "equivalent" in reality. Kushnina emphasizes the holistic study of translation as opposed to Nida's classical theory, identifying the factors contributing to translation quality separately. Besides inheriting predecessors' translation opinions, it also broadens and deepens translation study, which can be considered a breakthrough and supplement to Eugene's classical theory.

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